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Interpretations

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Allegorical interpretations of Genesis

Allegorical interpretations of Genesis

An **allegorical interpretation of Genesis** is a symbolic, rather than literal, reading of the biblical Book of Genesis. An allegorical interpretation does not necessarily preclude a literal interpretation; interpreters such as Origen of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo maintained that the Bible is true on multiple levels at the same time.

Genesis is part of the canonical scriptures for both Christianity and Judaism, and to a lesser degree Islam, and thus to believers is taken as being of spiritual significance. The opening sequences of the book tells the biblical story of origins. Those who read Genesis literally believe that it teaches the creation of humanity and the universe in general in a timeframe of six successive days of 24 hours duration. Those who favor an allegorical interpretation of the story claim that its intent is to describe humankind's relationship to creation and the creator.

Some Jews and Christians have long considered the creation account of Genesis as an allegory instead of as historical description, indeed much earlier than the development of modern science. Two notable examples are Augustine of Hippo (4th century) who, on theological grounds, argued that everything in the universe was created by God in the same instant, and not in six days as a plain account of Genesis would require [*http://www.asa3.org/ASA/topics/Bible-Science/PSCF3-88Young.html*] ; and the 1st century Jewish scholar Philo of Alexandria, who wrote that it would be a mistake to think that creation happened in six days or in any determinate amount of time. [*http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/book2.html*]

Interpretation

Church Historians on Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis

The literalist reading of some contemporary Christians maligns the allegorical or mythical interpretation of Genesis as a belated attempt to reconcile science with the biblical account. They maintain that the story of origins had always been interpreted literally until science (and, specifically, biological evolution) arose and challenged it. This view is not the consensus view, however, as demonstrated below:

According to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams: " [For] most of the history of the Christianity there's been an awareness that a belief that everything depends on the creative act of God, is quite compatible with a degree of uncertainty or latitude about how precisely that unfolds in creative time.Cite web|url=http://www.guardian.co.uk/religion/Story/0,,1735404,00.html|title=Transcript of Archbishop's interview with The

Guardian|accessyear=2007|accessmonthday=September 9|publisher=Rowan Williams Archbishop of Canterbury|year=2006|author=Rowan Williams|language=English]

Some religious historians consider that Biblical literalism came about with the rise of Protestantism; before the Reformation, the Bible was not usually interpreted in a completely literal way. Fr. Stanley Jaki, a Benedictine priest and theologian who is also a distinguished physicist, states in his "Bible and Science" (Christendom Press, 1996):

:"Insofar as the study of the original languages of the Bible was severed from authoritative ecclesiastical preaching as its matrix, it fueled literalism... Biblical literalism taken for a source of scientific information is making the rounds even nowadays among creationists who would merit Julian Huxley's description of 'bibliolaters.' They merely bring discredit to the Bible as they pile grist upon grist on the mills of latter-day Huxleys, such as Hoyle, Sagan, Gould, and others. The fallacies of creationism go deeper than fallacious reasonings about scientific data. Where creationism is fundamentally at fault is its resting its case on a theological faultline: the biblicism constructed by the [Protestant] Reformers." (Jaki, pages 110-111)

However, the Russian Orthodox hieromonk Fr. Seraphim Rose has argued that leading Orthodox saints such as Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom and Ephraim the Syrian believed that Genesis should be treated as a historical account. ("Genesis, Creation and Early Man", Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, CA, 2000) [*http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/phronema/evolution_frseraphim_kalomiros.aspx*] , [*http://www.answersingenesis.org/tj/v16/i3/orthodoxy.asp*] .

Contradictions

Contradictions in a text require some interpretation if the text is to be considered internally consistent. If the Genesis texts are taken literally, there are several prima facie examples, including:
*__Gen 1:25-27__ First plants are created, followed by animals, then man and woman. __Gen 2:18-22__ Adam is created, followed by animals, and then Eve.
*__Gen 2:17__ God says to Adam, "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." __Gen 5:5__ Adam lives several hundreds of years after eating the fruit.
*__Gen 4:14-16__ After killing Abel, Cain is worried that anybody who finds him will kill him, and then leaves to father many children, implying that there were many people to be afraid of, and that there were women to bear his children, and his sons' children. A literal interpretation would imply that the only humans alive were himself, Adam, and Eve. His next sibling is not born until later in the story (verse 25).
*__Gen 7:7-10__ Noah entered the ark seven days before the flood began. __Gen 7:11-13__ Noah entered the ark on the same day that the flood began.
*__Gen 7:8, 9, 15__ Noah brought two of every clean and unclean animal. __Gen 7:2__ Noah brought seven of every clean animal (or seven pairs, depending on translation).
*__Gen 8:4__ The ark floated for about seven months. __Gen 8:5__ The ark floated for at least ten months.
*__Gen 10:5__ Before the Tower of Babel, the land was divided according to tongues. __Gen 11:1__ Before the Tower of Babel, the whole earth was of one language.
*__Gen 21:31__ Beersheba was named by Abraham. __Gen 26:33__ Beersheba was named by Isaac.

In addition, there are elements of the Genesis story which are in apparent contradiction with other parts of the Bible:
*__Gen 1:16-19__ The stars were created after the earth. __Job 38:4-7__ The earth was created after the stars.
*__Gen 5:3-18__ Enoch was the sixth generation from Adam. __Jude 14__ Enoch was the seventh generation from Adam.
*__Gen 5:24__ Enoch did not die, but was taken away by God. __John 3:13__ "No man hath ascended up to heaven."
*__Acts 7:2-4, Gen 11:26,32__ Abraham was 135 when he left Haran. __Gen 12:4__ Abraham was 75 when he left Haran.

Some established Christian writers or authorities hold that the notion of contradictions is flawed and based primarily on taking passages out of context, confusing figurative and literal language, exaggeration of minor text variants and other such causes. The 1913 Catholic Encyclopedia uses the term "apparent contradictions" in its examination of the issue, maintaining that "it follows from what has been said that there can be no contradictions in the Bible, and that there can be no real opposition between Biblical statements..." [*The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church, By Charles George Herbermann, Edward Aloysius Pace, Condé Bénoist Pallen, Knights of Columbus Catholic Truth Committee, Thomas Joseph Shahan, John Joseph Wynne, Published by Encyclopedia Press, 1914, p. 274; [http://books.google.com/books?id=kO078Q2kb9wC&pg=PA274&dq=Biblical+contradictions Catholic Encyclopedia on 'apparent biblical contradictions', p 274"]*] The Encyclopedia offers the following on what it terms "apparent contradictions.":"In other cases the apparent contradictions in the Bible are due to an erroneous exegesis of one or both the passages in question. Such wrong interpretations are easily caused by the change in the meaning of a word; by the assumption of a wrong nexus of ideas (chronological, real, or psychological); by a restriction or an extension of the meaning of a passage beyond its natural limits; by an interchange of figurative with proper, of hypothetical with absolute language; a concession of Divine authority to mere quotations from profane sources, or by a neglect of the difference between the Old and the New Testament." [*Catholic Encyclopedia, p. 274*]

Other modern Christian writers repeat this general criticism, arguing that some claims of contradictions in Genesis and elsewhere are so stretched that::"It might even be said that if a scholar is expending his efforts to highlight contradictions in the biblical text and is not going beyond that to indicate how they may be resolved, he is not demonstrating his wisdom or honesty so much as he is demonstrating his failure as an interpreter of the Word of God. [*Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology, James Montgomery Boice, InterVarsity Press, 1986, ISBN 0877849919, 978087784991, p. 91, pp. 57-118*] [*Kenneth J. Howell, "Are There Contradictions in Genesis 1 and 2?," (n.d.) retrieved Augist 14, 2008 from http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/2004/0401sbs.asp*]

Ancient Christian Interpretations

Finding Allegory in History

The earliest recorded Christian allegorical interpretation of a passage in Genesis is found in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians in the New Testament. Paul writes:

:"For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. The child of the slave was born according to the flesh; the child of the free woman was born through the promise. Now this is being allegorized: for these women are two covenants. One, indeed, is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. This is Hagar, for Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is a slave with her children. But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother." [*http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?word=Galatians+4%3A22+-+26&section=0&version=nrs&new=1&oq=&NavBook=ga&NavGo=4&NavCurrentChapter=4 Galatians 4:22-26*]

The wording of the phrase, "this is being allegorized," indicates that Paul sees the passage as being true both literally and allegorically.

Other New Testament writers took a similar approach to the Jewish Bible. The Gospel of Matthew reinterprets a number of passages. Where the prophet Hosea has God say of Israel, "Out of Egypt I called my son," (Hosea 11:1), Matthew interprets the phrase as a reference to Jesus. Likewise, Isaiah's promise of a child as a sign to King

Ahaz (Isaiah 7:14) is understood by Matthew to refer to Jesus. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews saw symbolism in the rituals of ancient Israel, foreshadowing events in the life and death of Jesus.

Later Christians followed their example. Irenaeus of Lyons, writing in the middle of the 2nd century, saw the story of Adam, Eve and the serpent pointing to the death of Jesus:

:"Now in this same day that they did eat, in that also did they die. But according to the cycle and progress of the days, after which one is termed first, another second, and another third, if anybody seeks diligently to learn upon what day out of the seven it was that Adam died, he will find it by examining the dispensation of the Lord. For by summing up in Himself the whole human race from the beginning to the end, He has also summed up its death. From this it is clear that the Lord suffered death, in obedience to His Father, upon that day on which Adam died while he disobeyed God. Now he died on the same day in which he did eat. For God said, 'In that day on which ye shall eat of it, ye shall die by death.' The Lord, therefore, recapitulating in Himself this day, underwent His sufferings upon the day preceding the Sabbath, that is, the sixth day of the creation, on which day man was created; thus granting him a second creation by means of His passion, which is that [creation] out of death." ("Against Heresies" [*http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-63.htm#P9216_2679777*] 5.23.2.)

By the 3rd century, Origen and others of the Alexandrian school had allegorized nearly every passage in the Jewish Scriptures.

Days of Creation

:"See also: Creation according to Genesis"

Early Christians seem to have been divided over whether to interpret the days of creation in Genesis 1 as literal days, or to understand them allegorically.

For example, St. Basil rejected an allegorical interpretation in his Hexaëmeron, and affirmed 24-hour creation days:

:"I know the laws of allegory, though less by myself than from the works of others. There are those truly, who do not admit the common sense of the Scriptures, for whom water is not water, but some other nature, who see in a plant, in a fish, what their fancy wishes, who change the nature of reptiles and of wild beasts to suit their allegories, like the interpreters of dreams who explain visions in sleep to make them serve their own ends. For me grass is grass; plant, fish, wild beast, domestic animal, I take all in the literal sense. 'For I am not ashamed of the Gospel' [Romans 1:16] ." ([*http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/32019.htm Homily IX:1*])

:"'And there was evening and there was morning: one day.' And the evening and the morning were one day. Why does Scripture say 'one day the first day'? Before speaking to us of the second, the third, and the fourth days, would it not have been more natural to call that one the first which began the series? If it therefore says 'one day,' it is from a wish to determine the measure of day and night, and to combine the time that they contain. Now twenty-four hours fill up the space of one day -- we mean of a day and of a night; and if, at the time of the solstices, they have not both an equal length, the time marked by Scripture does not the less circumscribe their duration. It is as though it said: twenty-four hours measure the space of a day, or that, in reality a day is the time that the heavens starting from one point take to return there. Thus, every time that, in the revolution of the sun, evening and morning occupy the world, their periodical succession never exceeds the space of one day." ([*http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/32012.htm Homily II:8*])

Justin Martyr, on the other hand, argued that the days of creation must refer to much longer time spans:

:"For as Adam was told that in the day he ate of the tree he would die, we know that he did not complete a thousand years. We have perceived, moreover, that the expression, 'The day of the Lord is as a thousand years,' is connected with this subject." ([*http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html Dialogue with Trypho, chapter 81*])

Origen of Alexandria, in a passage that was later chosen by Gregory of Nazianzus for inclusion in the Philocalia, an anthology of some of his most important texts, made the following very modern-sounding remarks:

:"What intelligent person will suppose that there was a first, a second and a third day, that there was evening and morning without the existence of the sun and moon and stars? Or that there was a first day without a sky? Who could be so silly as to think that God planted a paradise in Eden in the East the way a human gardener does, and that he made in this garden a visible and palpable tree of life, so that by tasting its fruit with one's bodily teeth one should receive life? And in the same way, that someone could partake of good and evil by chewing what was taken from this tree? If God is represented as walking in the garden in the evening, or Adam as hiding under the tree, I do not think anyone can doubt that these things, by means of a story which did not in fact materially occur, are intended to express certain mysteries in a metaphorical way." (De Principiis IV, 3, 1 [*http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04124.htm*])

And in another passage, writing in response to the pagan intellectual Celsus, he said:

:"And with regard to the creation of the light upon the first day, and of the firmament upon the second, and of the gathering together of the waters that are under the heaven into their several reservoirs on the third (the earth thus causing to sprout forth those (fruits) which are under the control of nature alone, and of the (great) lights and stars upon the fourth, and of aquatic animals upon the fifth, and of land animals and man upon the sixth, we have treated to the best of our ability in our notes upon Genesis, as well as in the foregoing pages, when we found fault with those who, taking the words in their apparent signification, said that the time of six days was occupied in the creation of the world." ("Contra Celsus" [*http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04166.htm 6.60*])

Saint Augustine, one of the most influential theologians of the Catholic Church, suggested that the Biblical text should not be interpreted literally if it contradicts what we know from science and our God-given reason. From an important passage on his "The Literal Interpretation of Genesis" (early fifth century, AD), St. Augustine wrote:

:"It not infrequently happens that something about the earth, about the sky, about other elements of this world, about the motion and rotation or even the magnitude and distances of the stars, about definite eclipses of the sun and moon, about the passage of years and seasons, about the nature of animals, of fruits, of stones, and of other such things, may be known with the greatest certainty by reasoning or by experience, even by one who is not a Christian. It is too disgraceful and ruinous, though, and greatly to be avoided, that he [the non-Christian] should hear a Christian speaking so idiotically on these matters, and as if in accord with Christian writings, that he might say that he could scarcely keep from laughing when he saw how totally in error they are. In view of this and in keeping it in mind constantly while dealing with the book of Genesis, I have, insofar as I was able, explained in detail and set forth for consideration the meanings of obscure passages, taking care not to affirm rashly some one meaning to the prejudice of another and perhaps better explanation." (The Literal Interpretation of Genesis 1:19–20, Chapt. 19 [AD 408])

:"With the scriptures it is a matter of treating about the faith. For that reason, as I have noted repeatedly, if anyone, not understanding the mode of divine eloquence, should find something about these matters [about the physical universe] in our books, or hear of the same from those books, of such a kind that it seems to be at variance with the perceptions of his own rational faculties, let him believe that these other things are in no way necessary to the

admonitions or accounts or predictions of the scriptures. In short, it must be said that our authors knew the truth about the nature of the skies, but it was not the intention of the Spirit of God, who spoke through them, to teach men anything that would not be of use to them for their salvation." (ibid, 2:9)

In the book, Augustine took the view that everything in the universe was created simultaneously by God, and not in seven days like a plain account of Genesis would require. He argues that the six-day structure of creation presented in the book of Genesis represents a logical framework, rather than the passage of time in a physical way. Augustine also doesn't envisage original sin as originating structural changes in the universe, and even suggests that the bodies of Adam and Eve were already created mortal before the Fall. Apart from his specific views, Augustine recognizes that the interpretation of the creation story is difficult, and remarks that we should be willing to change our mind about it as new information comes up. [*http://www.asa3.org/ASA/topics/Bible-Science/PSCF3-88Young.html*]

In "The City of God", Augustine also defended the idea of a young Earth. Augustine rejected both the immortality of the human race proposed by pagans, and contemporary ideas of ages (such as those of certain Greeks and Egyptians) that differed from the Church's sacred writings:

:"Let us, then, omit the conjectures of men who know not what they say, when they speak of the nature and origin of the human race. For some hold the same opinion regarding men that they hold regarding the world itself, that they have always been... They are deceived, too, by those highly mendacious documents which profess to give the history of many thousand years, though, reckoning by the sacred writings, we find that not 6000 years have yet passed." (Augustine, [*http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF1-02/npnf1-02-18.htm#P2017_1154484 Of the Falseness of the History Which Allots Many Thousand Years to the World's Past*] , "The City of God", Book 12: Chapt. 10 [AD 419]).

St. Augustine also comments on the word "day" in the creation week, admitting the interpretation is difficult:

:"But simultaneously with time the world was made, if in the world's creation change and motion were created, as seems evident from the order of the first six or seven days. For in these days the morning and evening are counted, until, on the sixth day, all things which God then made were finished, and on the seventh the rest of God was mysteriously and sublimely signalized. What kind of days these were it is extremely difficult, or perhaps impossible for us to conceive, and how much more to say!" ("City of God", Book 11: Chapt. 6).

Contemporary Christian considerations

In light of scientific findings regarding the age and origins of the universe and life, many modern Christian theologians, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant, have rejected literalistic interpretations of Genesis in favour of allegorical or poetic interpretations such as the literary framework view.

Catholic theologian Ludwig Ott in his authoritative "Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma", under the section "The Divine Work of Creation," (pages 92-122) covers the "biblical hexahemeron" (the "six days" of creation), the creation of man, Adam/Eve, original sin, the Fall, and the statements of the early Fathers, Saints, Church Councils, and Popes relevant to the matter. Ott makes the following comments on the "science" of Genesis and the Fathers:

:"...as the hagiographers in profane things make use of a popular, that is, a non-scientific form of exposition suitable to the mental perception of their times, a more liberal interpretation, is possible here. The Church gives no positive decisions in regard to purely scientific questions, but limits itself to rejecting errors which endanger faith. Further, in these scientific matters there is no virtue in a consensus of the Fathers since they are not here acting as witnesses of the Faith, but merely as private scientists... Since the findings of reason and the supernatural knowledge of Faith

go back to the same source, namely to God, there can never be a real contradiction between the certain discoveries of the profane sciences and the Word of God properly understood." (Ott, page 92)

:"As the Sacred Writer had not the intention of representing with scientific accuracy the intrinsic constitution of things, and the sequence of the works of creation but of communicating knowledge in a popular way suitable to the idiom and to the pre-scientific development of his time, the account is not to be regarded or measured as if it were couched in language which is strictly scientific... The Biblical account of the duration and order of Creation is merely a literary clothing of the religious truth that the whole world was called into existence by the creative word of God. The Sacred Writer utilized for this purpose the pre-scientific picture of the world existing at the time. The numeral six of the days of Creation is to be understood as an anthropomorphism. God's work of creation represented in schematic form (opus distinctionis -- opus ornatus) by the picture of a human working week, the termination of the work by the picture of the Sabbath rest. The purpose of this literary device is to manifest Divine approval of the working week and the Sabbath rest." (Ott, page 93, cf. Exod 20:8)

Pope John Paul II wrote to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the subject of cosmology and how to interpret Genesis:

:"Cosmogony and cosmology have always aroused great interest among peoples and religions. The Bible itself speaks to us of the origin of the universe and its make-up, not in order to provide us with a scientific treatise, but in order to state the correct relationships of man with God and with the universe. Sacred Scripture wishes simply to declare that the world was created by God, and in order to teach this truth it expresses itself in the terms of the cosmology in use at the time of the writer. The Sacred Book likewise wishes to tell men that the world was not created as the seat of the gods, as was taught by other cosmogonies and cosmologies, but was rather created for the service of man and the glory of God. Any other teaching about the origin and make-up of the universe is alien to the intentions of the Bible, which does not wish to teach how heaven was made but how one goes to heaven." (Pope John Paul II, 3 October 1981 to the Pontifical Academy of Science, [*http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2COSM.HTM "Cosmology and Fundamental Physics"*])

The "Clergy Letter" Project, drafted in 2004, and signed by thousands of Christian clergy supporting science and faith, states:

:"We the undersigned, Christian clergy from many different traditions, believe that the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist. We believe that the theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth, one that has stood up to rigorous scrutiny and upon which much of human knowledge and achievement rests. To reject this truth or to treat it as 'one theory among others' is to deliberately embrace scientific ignorance and transmit such ignorance to our children. We believe that among God's good gifts are human minds capable of critical thought and that the failure to fully employ this gift is a rejection of the will of our Creator." ([*http://www.uwosh.edu/colleges/cols/religion_science_collaboration.htm An Open Letter Concerning Religion and Science*])

Prominent evangelical advocates of metaphorical interpretations of Genesis include Meredith G. Kline and Henri Blocher who advocate the literary framework view. In "Beyond the Firmament: Understanding Science and the Theology of Creation", evangelical author Gordon J. Glover argues for an ancient near-eastern cosmology interpretation of Genesis, which he labels the theology of creation:

:"Christians need to understand the first chapter of Genesis for what it is: an 'accurate' rendering of the physical universe by ancient standards that God used as the vehicle to deliver timeless theological truth to His people. We shouldn't try to make Genesis into something that it's not by dragging it through 3,500 years of scientific progress. When reading Genesis, Christians today need to transport themselves back to Mt. Sinai and leave our modern

minds in the 21st century. If you only remember one thing from this chapter make it this: Genesis is not giving us creation science. It is giving us something much more profound and practical than that. Genesis is giving us a Biblical Theology of Creation." [*cite book | last=Glover | first=Gordon J. | year=2007 | title=Beyond the Firmament: Understanding Science and the Theology of Creation | location= Chesapeake, VA| publisher=Watertree | id=ISBN 0978718615*]

Rabbinic teachings

Some medieval philosophical rationalists, such as Maimonides held that it was not required to read Genesis literally. In this view, one was obligated to understand Torah in a way that was compatible with the findings of science. Indeed, Maimonides, one of the great rabbis of the Middle Ages, wrote that if science and Torah were misaligned, it was either because science was not understood or the Torah was misinterpreted. Maimonides argued that if science proved a point, then the finding should be accepted and scripture should be interpreted accordingly.

Rabbi Simeon Bar Yohai in the 2nd century wrote::"If a man looks upon the Torah as merely a book presenting narratives and everyday matters, alas for him! Such a torah, one treating with everyday concerns, and indeed a more excellent one, we too, even we, could compile. More than that, in the possession of the rulers of the world there are books of even greater merit, and these we could emulate if we wished to compile some such torah. But the Torah, in all of its words, holds supernal truths and sublime secrets.": "Thus the tales related in the Torah are simply her outer garments, and woe to the man who regards that outer garb as the Torah itself, for such a man will be deprived of portion in the next world. Thus David said:" Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law" (Psalms 119:18), that is to say, the things that are underneath. See now. The most visible part of a man are the clothes that he has on, and they who lack understanding, when they look at the man, are apt not to see more in him than these clothes. In reality, however, it is the body of the man that constitutes the pride of his clothes, and his soul constitutes the pride of his body.": "Woe to the sinners who look upon the Torah as simply tales pertaining to things of the world, seeing thus only the outer garment. But the righteous whose gaze penetrates to the very Torah, happy are they. Just as wine must be in a jar to keep, so the Torah must also be contained in an outer garment. That garment is made up of the tales and stories; but we, we are bound to penetrate beyond."

Nahmanides, often critical of the rationalist views of Maimonides, pointed out (in his commentary to Genesis) several non-sequiturs stemming from a literal translation of the Bible's account of Creation, and stated that the account actually symbolically refers to spiritual concepts. He quoted the Mishnah in Tractate Chagigah which states that the actual meaning of the Creation account, mystical in nature, was traditionally transmitted from teachers to advanced scholars in a private setting. Many Kabbalistic sources mention "Shmitot" - cosmic cycles of creation, similar to the Indian concept of yugas. According to the tradition of "Shmitot", Genesis talks openly only about the current epoch, while the information about the previous cosmic cycles is hidden in the esoteric reading of the text.

A literal interpretation of the biblical Creation story among Jews today is rare among non-Orthodox groups. Indeed, most Conservative and Reformed denominations hold to the view that the creation story can safely be viewed as allegory.

The position of Orthodox Jews has, for some time, been more or less favorable of a literal approach, as evidenced by the uproar that occurred when modern-day biblical commentators expressed their nonliteral interpretations of the accounts related in Genesis, despite being based heavily on views taken by classical commentators such as Rambam and Ralbag. Rabbi Natan Slifkin, in his work The Challenge of Creation, elaborates on his perspective as it relates to Judaism's encounter with science, cosmology and evolution.

ee also

*Theistic evolution
*Framework interpretation
*Biblical cosmology
*Creation according to Genesis
*Creation-evolution controversy
*Evolution and the Roman Catholic Church
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References

External links

* [*http://www.asa3.org/ASA/topics/Bible-Science/PSCF3-88Young.html The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation*]
* [*http://home.entouch.net/dmd/churchfathers.htm Early Church Fathers vs. Young Earth Creationism*]
* [*http://www.catholicmatch.com/pl/pages/articles/details.html?ra=1;article_id=679 Four Senses of Scripture*] includes background on the history of non-literal interpretation

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